

Nuclear bomb storage

Ellsberg: U.S. violated Japan security treaty

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Ex-Pentagon analyst Daniel Ellsberg said Tuesday the U.S. military kept secret from American and Japanese government officials the presence of nuclear bombs stored in Japan in violation of a U.S.-Japanese security pact.

Ellsberg said the devices were kept 100 to 200 yards offshore of the U.S. Marine base at Iwakuni in a naval landing craft listed as stationed in Okinawa "to deceive the secretary of defense," then Robert McNamara.

Ellsberg also repeated his charge that Presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson secretly delegated to a half-dozen top military commanders the right to order a nuclear attack under certain conditions. He said he learned during a 1961 fact-finding trip to the Pacific that one such authorization was extended to an unknown number of "intermediate" officers.

ELLSBERG SAID HE learned of the nuclear weapons at Iwakuni and the presidential authorizations between 1959 and the early '60s, when he was on loan from the Rand Corp. to the Defense Department to analyze the U.S. nuclear command chain.

He said he doesn't know if the U.S. still maintains a nuclear presence at the Japanese base or if presidents since Johnson also have delegated authority over nuclear weapons to military personnel.

The Defense Department and the White House would not comment on the allegations, saying nuclear weapons strategy is a national security matter that can't be discussed.

Ellsberg, who arrived in Denver to take part in a Wednesday Hiroshima Day demonstration at the Rocky Flats nuclear weapons plant, said he heard about the bomb-carrying landing craft during his travels in the Pacific, and later confirmed its presence in a conversation with a top official at "CINCPAC" the headquarters of the U.S. Pacific commander in chief.

In a memorandum he gave the News, Ellsberg said the ship at Iwakuni was strategically irrelevant and a threat to U.S. diplomatic relations if its cargo became known in Japan. "It was understood by everybody that violation of that provision (barring nuclear weapons from Japan) was likely to lead to an abrogation of the security treaty, and probably to the fall of any pro-U.S. government in Japan," he wrote.

ELLSBERG SAID HIS report on the subject led to a Defense Department investigation that culminated in a showdown between

Pentagon civilians and top Navy officers who said it was "absolutely unacceptable" for civilians to tell the Navy where to put its ships.

Ellsberg said the military won because McNamara "decided that, with all the fights he was having with the various services, this was one he could not afford to add."

A Defense Department spokesman said only that Iwakuni is still an active Marine air base. "You know we never confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons," he said.

Ellsberg said that in 1961 he told White House special assistant McGeorge Bundy and Bundy aide Carl Kayson of the existence of letters from former President Dwight D. Eisenhower to "at least five" top commanders authorizing them to wage nuclear war in specific emergency situations. Ellsberg said Bundy and Kayson investigated, learned the letters did exist, and informed President Kennedy, who issued letters of his own.

Ellsberg said military leaders were "determined not to have locks on those weapons," and harbored "a very deep distrust, and by the way, a well-justified distrust," of civilian "willingness to initiate nuclear war."

THE "OFFICIAL RATIONALE" for the delegation letters "was the possibility that communications could be cut under conditions of war and it might be impossible to get an explicit authorization," Ellsberg said.

Though the policy ran "contrary to all public statement over the last thirty years" about civilian control of the nuclear button, it may well have been known to enemy leaders, said Ellsberg.

"It would not be reasonable to keep this from the Russians," who might otherwise think U.S. nuclear warmaking capability could be shattered in the event of an attack on Washington, said Ellsberg.

McGeorge Bundy, who heads the Ford Foundation, could not be reached for comment, and Carl Kayson, now in Boston, refused to come to the telephone.

Pentagon spokesman Lt. Colonel James Barr asserted that "now, as in the past, only the president can authorize the use of nuclear weapons ... All of our plans and procedures are consistent with that specific presidential responsibility and authority."

A White House spokeswoman wouldn't say whether presidential letters of delegation exist now or did in the past.

Since the subject "does deal with how we'd respond to a nuclear attack," it's a matter of "national security and we wouldn't discuss it," said Carter press aide Patricia Barrios.